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UNCLAS KABUL 002437

DEPT FOR AFGHAN ELECTIONS TASK FORCE

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: Afghan Elections Situation Report Five - 1200 Local, August 20, 2009

¶1. (SBU) The next sitrep is scheduled for 1600 local on August 20.

Security

¶2. The security situation is unusually good, but as of 1200 hrs, ISAF has reported some security incidents directed at the election, but none significant enough to affect election structure.

Provincial reports by region follow:

Regional Command (RC) - North: Kunduz: PRT reports rocket attacks continued this morning, with four rockets hitting the city shortly before 8 am. No reports yet of casualties.

Faryab: Voting centers in the Khowaja Kinti and Khowaja Asfalan Villages of Qaysar District have not opened because ANP scheduled to patrol there were pulled away to reinforce other officers involved in a firefight in an unspecified neighboring village. The PEO has not been able to contact the polling site in Qasaba Qala Village of Pashtun Kowt District of Faryab, since yesterday. He therefore cannot confirm if the polling site opened. He reported all 12 voting centers in Gormach District opened.

Baghlan: Anti-coalition forces in Sar-e Khona district have been conducting significant harassment and interdiction in the district area. It is not clear if this is directed at voters. ISAF responded to requests for in extremis support in the form of a show of force by air power, which they are providing. A community elder in Amer Abubakar reported to USAID PRT Rep that Baghlan's Jadid district chief of police was killed in an attack in the Tapa Pashae area of old Baghlan around 8:30 AM this morning by insurgents. USAID LES reports there is a critical situation in the whole district of Baghlan Jadid especially along the main road of Baghlan and Kunduz, with fighting in different locations between insurgents and ANP and ANA. The main road is reportedly blocked. Three rockets were fired into a residential area next to district center of Baghlan Jadid with no reports of damage or casualties.

RC - South: Uruzgan: The governor reported to PRT DOS Rep that a rocket fired into the city of Chora killed one civilian and injured another. Uruzgan and ISAF security forces are presently engaged with Taliban fighters in Khas Uruzgan and Deh Rahwod, which may jeopardize the voting in select areas of those two districts. The governor also reported that his intelligence sources reported the placement of B1 rockets along a nearby mountain range, with the aim of striking the governor's compound (NFI). Roads have been shut to vehicle traffic for the duration of the vote, adding to the sense of calm in the capitol. ANA, ANP and NDS generals are all currently monitoring the security situation at Uruzgan's OCC-P as are U.S.,

Dutch and Australian military commanders and civilian political advisors. Situation has become more tense in the capitol city and elsewhere in the province as there have been at least three separate rocket attacks, the most recent fell near a police check-point, close to the governor's compound. Separately, the governor reported and a UN contact confirmed that the polling station in Hussinea, within Khas Uruzgan district, is surrounded by Taliban and attacking the station. Election workers are attempting to secure the sensitive election material and flee the location. Despite these attacks voter turnout remained steady throughout the morning and a mobile polling station has been established to reach those police and army officials who cannot leave their assigned locations.

Helmand: There was a flurry of attacks from 0700-0730, including an IED strike on PRT convoy and multiple IDF, but does not appear to be deterring most voters. Many centers opened late. Mixed reports on turnout from observers and LE staff. Security at PCs is reasonably good; we have a report of one candidate agent (Karzai's) who was instructing people how to vote being ejected by IEC staff. Irregularities include some voting using entire families' cards and a man in Kajaki telling IEC workers there would be 20,000 votes for Karzai there. Widespread problems with hole punches so IEC staff are ad hoc mutilating or cutting off the laminated corners of cards; however, some reports that voters just re-laminate the card and go vote again. Sporadic reports of underage voters, voters refusing ink for fingers, and some campaigning within polling centers, but this does not appear widespread. Local IEC head says turnout less than expected in Lashkar Gah, though NDS says turnout is good.

RC - East: Kabul: Global Securities official reports a bomb blast at 0800 at center #125, 2 ANFREL observers are fine. MOI and NATO report ongoing gun-battle in PD-8 district of Kabul - Post is tracking these developments.

Takhar: Global securities reports a bomb blast near polling station and voters fled to other polling stations in nearby areas. An IED was found and defused by ANP, though the device later exploded in the warehouse where it was taken for storage. No injuries were reported.

Kapisa: Swedish embassy reports shots fired at Abdullah Office, in Shar-e-Nau. More reports of three centers in Balkh Province where hole-punchers were not working. The poll station officials were improvising by using scissors to clip the corner off the voting cards.

Khost: PRT Khost reports there was a rocket attack directly outside the PRT at around 0900 local time. There were no reported casualties. While some polling sites opened late as elections workers got themselves organized, the PEO reports all polling centers are open and operational. Despite a high number of harassing incidences of direct and indirect fire across the province, local contacts report strong turnout, primarily male, in Tani, Gorbuz, Mandozai, Nader Shah Kot, Dwamanda, Matun, and Jaji Maidan Districts. Female turnout is generally low, but there are reports from Tani, Mandozai, and Matun Districts suggesting robust female turnout at some individual polling centers. Voting in Khost City got off to a slow start, but picked up throughout the morning; long lines are now reported in the city. Many people have come from more rural areas to vote in the city, believing security will be better in the urban center. Some of these same voters asked polling station workers to not stain their fingers with ink for fear of insurgent reprisals; IEC workers refused their requests.

Ghazni: DOS OCC-P reported three rockets landed in Ghazni City, one near the Governor's Compound at about 0750 local time. The rockets or mortars are being fired from Qalay Qazi west of the city center. According to OCC-P, ANP found mines on the road to Zana Khan district around 0800 local time, and believes the mines have been planted to prevent people from traveling there to vote. OCC-P reports that the polling center in Qareh Baghi village on the southern border of Ghazni District has been closed due to security reasons. ANP is reportedly moving the election materials back to Ghazni City. People are being directed to vote in nearby Mungur village.

Kabul: According to Observation teams, polling center 223 opened a

bit late but is now functioning. No weapons are allowed in the voting areas. Private vehicles are circulating; mostly taxis are seen. Several checkpoints throughout the city, cars are being stopped for ID checks. At Kabul station #219, no long lines, but a steady stream of voters, more men than women, no problems reported. At Poll Station #184, 1/8 hole punches broken and officials are improvising using scissors and cutting triangle in corner of card. Team 6 Reports the punches at Station #194 are also broken. However, the polling staff is improvising by cutting a small rectangular notch out of the IDs with scissors. Station 194 appears to be otherwise working smoothly. Team 6 received information from another observation team that Station #182 also experiencing problems with card punches also. Team 4 at polling station #214 states station well organized, but sparse attendance. Observed approx. 15 voters.

Paktia: PRT Gardez reports there were 12 attacks on polling centers or city/village centers throughout Paktya province before 9am. In Jani Khel District, IEC Provincial Director Najibullah Ahmadzai reported that polling stations were closed temporarily due to missile attacks and were reopened by 10:00 am. DFC Salihuddin reported that the polling stations in Azbad Shah appeared to be locked and were taking continuous rocket attacks by Taliban/insurgents. In Gardez City, a suicide bomber detonated himself at about 10:00 a.m. near UNAMA offices and the Governor's Compound. There are no reports of injuries from the attack. There is no apparent effort to block people from going to the polls and voting. There is good voter turnout, including among women. In Chamkani district, the District Field Coordinator reported all polling centers opened on time, but security is unstable, with several bombs having detonated along the main Chamkani road to the polling station. There have been eight reported civilian deaths. Additionally, eight RPG's were fired at the polling station before 10:00 a.m. In Zarmot District, DFC reported the security atmosphere is permissive in the Nik Nam polling station with no reports of missiles or IED's. Men and women alike are voting and there are no reports of intimidation at this time.

Nangarhar: Security incidents have focused on the volatile southern border districts of Nangarhar Province. An IED in Khogyani District killed the Deputy Police Chief and one policeman and seriously

injured another policeman. There were several small arms attacks overnight and this morning on polling stations, mostly resulting in minor damage that did not effect polling stations' operations. In Pachir Wa Agam District, however, one RPG and two mortar attacks on polling stations resulted in minor injuries to two ANP. In Jalalabad there was one small explosion near a polling station that temporarily halted voting, but voters did not leave the line. Initial reports indicate there were no casualties.

Paktika: Paktika has witnessed robust voting throughout the province, particularly in Sharana, where the volume of early morning voters necessitated the deployment of additional ANSF assets to assist with crowd control. Election-related violence, generally through indirect fire, in the district centers of Naka, Orgun, Bermel, Khushamond, and Gomal appears not to have deterred participation. Turnout is so strong in the southern districts of Terwa and War Mamay that DFCs have requested additional balloting material. Roullah Muslimyar, of Paktika's ECC office, told PRT that his office had received a spot report from an ECC representative observing voting in Sharana that a man presented seven to ten valid registration cards and was attempting to vote on behalf of these individuals. The man, according to the ECC, was given ballots for each of the cards by polling site staff and voted. Muslimyar said that when representatives from ECC HQ arrived at the site to stop this individual from voting, they were barred from entering by the polling center manager, who said he had guidance that ECC HQ staff were not allowed to enter.

RC - West: Ghor: Election day is proceeding with minimal problems. Two polling centers in Dolatyar district were closed for 30 minutes due to interference of a PC candidate. ANSF restored order and the PCs are open as of 1010. Voting in Chaghcharan is proceeding with few problems. Balloting procedures are generally being observed and polling centers are orderly with good turnout (especially women). The biggest problem is that at the women's polling center, where Kuchi women did not seem informed on the presidential election.

Some IEC officials handing out ballots told them "just vote for Karzai." According to both the IEC and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 99 of the 250 polling stations in Ghor Province are without ANP presence. Earlier reports that insurgent commander Mullah Mustafa was in control of eight polling sites were false. We are working to follow up with our PRT Rep in Ghor.

Badghis: DOS Reps observed the main polling centers in central Qala-e-Now. At the men's polling center, polls opened 35 minutes late due to the delayed arrival of Governor Arman for an opening ceremony. The voting process appeared orderly and without major problems. Several candidates were observed lingering in the polling center, while one voter was wearing a campaign button and several cars parked within ten meters of the center had campaign posters prominently displayed. In the women's center, the scene was chaotic. Women were patted down (by women) at the entrance, resulting in a long delay to enter the polling area. In contrast, men were not searched at their polling center and could enter immediately. Police outside the polling center were abusive towards the waiting women, pushing them back with their arms and their weapons, and occasionally hitting them with scarves. More than one hundred women waited outside. Inside, the atmosphere inside was calmer, and poll workers appeared to be observing all procedures. However, the ANP chief in Mogur district reported that two centers had not yet opened and it wasn't clear if the Taliban would allow their opening.

Voting & Counting Activities

13. (U) According to Embassy observer teams and news reports, polling sites have opened as scheduled across the country, with no current reports of any sites not opening as planned.

14. (U) Ghazni: OCC-P reported at 0830 good voter turnout at Deh Yak district, while Governor Usmani reported the same in Andar district. An American soldier located in Ajiristan reported via radio that 20-30 people have showed up to vote so far, and appear enthusiastic, even while Taliban are moving about to confiscate voter registration cards.

15. (U) Kabul: Post has received reports that holepunches at polling stations 182 and 183 have malfunctioned. Due to the malfunctions, four of six polling stations at site 183 have stopped functioning pending repair of the punches. Observers report growing lines as the IEC officers await a solution. German embassy reported unauthorized persons seen at polling sites - wearing colored armbands that said "volunteer."

16. (SBU) Kunduz: Some polling centers in three districts not open. According to IEC and UNDP sources, election materials have yet to make their way to at least some polling centers in Chahar Dara, Dasht-e-Archi, and Aliabad districts. IEC did not have an exact number of how many polling centers were affected but says efforts are under way to transport materials to those polling centers.

17. (U) Nangarhar: Balloting material was delivered to all 492 voting centers in Nangarhar with the exception of one remote location in the Markhanie area of Pachir Wa Agam District near the Pakistani border, according to Nangarhar IEC officials. The material could only be transported by donkey, and police refused to provide security to the polling site because of insurgent activity in the area and threats received by insurgents, according to IEC officials.

Voter Turnout

18. (SBU) Thus far, voter turnout appears to be lower than expected. There is considerable speculation that many Afghans are waiting to ensure it is safe to vote, which could result in an increased turnout in the afternoon. Polling began generally on time, with President Karzai and Independent Election Commission Chairman Ludin having been televised casting their votes on local and international television.

Khost: OCC-P Khost reports good turnout at many polling locations so far this morning. We will report more fully when able to confirm specifics.

Nangarhar: Anecdotal reports indicate voter turnout in Jalalabad started slowly, as voters waited to assess the security situation, but has been picking up during the morning. The Nangarhar Provincial Police Chief reports good voter across the Province. Presidential and Provincial Council campaigns have been offering free transportation to voters to the polls in all Districts. In the border districts of Achin and Khogyani, tribal elders have been encouraging citizens to assist the police with security and to vote. Tribal elders report good voter turnout in Khogyani, while in Achin male turnout has been high but female turnout low due to the IEC's inability to recruit female polling station workers.

Fraud

¶9. (U) Nangarhar: Election Observers and Provincial Council Candidates complained to the IEC in the morning that certain IEC workers in Kama and Kuz Kunar Districts, as well as Jalalabad City, were reportedly urging voters to cast their ballot for specific PC candidates, IEC officials reported. The IEC sent representatives to balloting sites and fired the IEC workers on the spot, according to Abdullah Safar, the IEC Administrative and Logistic Director reported. The IEC reported that a Provincial Council candidate from Mohmand Dara, Fida Mohammad Gardawal, was openly campaigning in front of a polling station and urging voters to cast their ballot for him. IEC officials sent a team in the morning to investigate. Additional reports indicated that IEC workers at the same voting center were urging voters to vote for Gardawal.

Atmospherics

¶10. (SBU) Paktika OCC-P reports robust voter turnout in Sharana, leading ANP to request additional ANSF support to handle the large crowds. PEO Taj Ali reports all polling sites in Paktika opened as scheduled this morning and that there is "good turnout" throughout the province. He confirmed OCC-P's report of large voter turnout in Sharana, and said that there has been no attack or threat perpetuated against the province's polling sites overnight or this morning.

Uruzgan: Atmospherics: At of 0900 local time, all is quiet in the capitol city of Tarin Kowt with reported long lines forming at the various polling stations around the city. Governor Hamdam and his line ministers, along with about 50 guests, kicked off the election by voting at a small polling station established in the governor's garden. PRT DOS rep and a Dutch Civilian Representative, who was also dual-hatted as an EU observer attended.

Public Affairs

¶11. (U) AFGHAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS:

The leading story in the Afghan media was the opening of polling stations throughout the country. President Karzai cast his vote at Amani High School in Kabul. He called on Afghans to take part in the elections and expressed hope that the elections would lead to a more secure and prosperous Afghanistan. He added that the elections are a great democratic achievement for Afghanistan. Abdullah Abdullah, Karzai's main rival, cast his vote at Nadiria high school in Kabul. There were reports of high turnout in some provinces, including Herat, Badakshan, Mazar, Bamyan and Jalalabad. However, there were reports of technical problems with voting equipment in Kabul and some other provinces. Tolo TV reported that underage boys were seen casting their votes at some polling centers in the provinces of Bamyan, Kunar and Takhar.

Pajhwok News reported that bad quality ink is being used in two

polling stations in Kabul. Ramadan Bashardost, one of the presidential candidates, said that the ink came off easily and called it a fraud.

Ariana TV reported that the Afghan police confiscated a car laden with explosives in Logar province.

Pajhwok Afghan News reported that two suicide bombers were arrested in Takhar province. According to security officials, the suicide bombers were attempting to attack polling sites in the province.

Pajhwok Afghan News also reported on a lack of police presence in 90 polling sites in Ghor province. The IEC and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission confirmed the report and expressed concern over the fairness of elections in the province.

BBC reported that 31 polling sites were closed in Gardez, Zurmat and Jani Khail districts of Paktia province due to security concerns. Provincial security officials said that security threats and the fact that the IEC staff did not report for work were the reasons for the closure.

Radio Azadi reported on three explosions in Kabul this morning. The Ministry of Defense confirmed the report and said there were no casualties.

BBC reported that two people were killed when a rocket landed near a polling station in Helmand province. Taliban claimed the responsibility for the attack.

Radio Azadi features interviews with people on the streets of Kabul and southern Kandahar province. One of residents of southern Kandahar province says he was very happy and willing to take part in the election and vote for his favorite candidate without fear. A female teacher of a school in the capital Kabul says she had not registered for elections and would not vote because according to her, the next Afghan president had already been selected and going to the polling box was useless. She says it the foreign countries are the real decision-makers in Afghanistan and that foreigners have been the real role-players in Afghanistan for the past 30 years. The report also reports optimism and increased enthusiasm and interest of people in southern Kandahar province in the voting process. But the reporter says not many women could be seen coming to polling stations to vote expecting low turnout of women in the polls.

Provincial Media Reports:

Tolo TV in central Bamyan province reports participation of boys under the age of 18 (not voting age) in the voting process. A reporter says he saw boys under age 15 coming to polling stations to vote. The reporter also says he saw cars with the pictures of some candidates tagged on their windshields stopping in front of groups of people walking towards polling stations. According to the reporter, people inside these cars were asking people to go with them to the polling stations and vote for the candidates whose pictures were tagged on their cars. Tolo TV also reports on optimism and large numbers of women participating in the voting process in Pul-e-Khomri, the capital of northern Baghlan province.

Tolo TV: A resident of the capital Kabul in interview with Tolo TV reporter says he was fed up with poverty and will carry out a suicide attack unless the government does something to improved his living condition. Another angry resident of Kabul criticized the current government for failing to improve the lives of ordinary

people, saying he is undecided who to vote for and that he might not even go to the polling box and vote. Yet another resident of Kabul says he was happy to take part in the elections, which is an important opportunity for all Afghans.

Tolo TV also reported a smooth move-ahead in the voting process in central Ghazni province, stating that people were standing in long lines to vote.

A Tolo TV reporter in eastern Nangarhar province says he saw groups of people walking towards polling centers to vote. The TV presenter reports that a lack of voting materials at some polling stations in

remote districts of northern and southern Afghan provinces are hampering the province.

A 'Tolo TV' reporter from central Maidan Wardak province quotes residents as saying that the ink used in marking the voters is removable. According to report, polling centers in some other districts of the province were still not clearly identified by the provincial Independent Election Commission (IEC) and people did not know where to go to vote.

Tolo TV reports from southeastern Paktia on fires in Gardez. According to the reporter, two rockets were fired on the city this morning and landed in non-residential areas. The reporter also says residents in groups were walking towards polling stations to vote. There were no casualties.

A Tolo TV reporter from western Herat reports on a lack of polling stations in the province, quoting residents as saying that they had to wait hours at the polling stations to vote. The reporter says the city of Herat was under a tight security precaution and that the police and national army forces could be seen everywhere in the city searching cars and people.

12. (SBU) MESSAGING: Messaging remains consistent with Afghan Elections Situation Report One. We will review and update as necessary for the next report.

EIKENBERRY